



B O S T O N

Should I stockpile Tamiflu or other medications for a possible avian influenza outbreak?

What is stockpiling?

Stockpiling is getting a prescription for medication and then keeping the pills at your home “just in case” you have an illness in the future.

Is it a good idea to get a supply now of Tamiflu “just in case?”

There could be many problems associated with stockpiling Tamiflu. Prescription medications, including those used to treat influenza and other infections, are very powerful medications and can have unwanted side effects if they are not used correctly. Many drugs lose their potency over time, particularly if they are not properly stored. If medicine is not correctly stored at home, it may become useless. Medicines like Tamiflu are also very expensive, and you may end up spending a lot of money on a medicine that you never need. Finally, and most importantly, a person may take the stockpiled medication when it is not needed (they have a cold instead of the flu). If the person needs another medication instead – such as an antibiotic, that person could think they are getting appropriate treatment for their illness when in fact they are not. Inappropriate use of any medicine like an antibiotic or antiviral may lead to drug resistance.

Why is drug resistance a problem?

Drug resistance occurs when germs become resistant or are no longer killed off by a certain medication. This happens when bacteria or virus change in such a way that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of the medicine. Widespread use of Tamiflu among patients could lead to resistant strains of the flu making the drug useless.

I have heard that Tamiflu is the only medicine that will work against avian influenza. Is that true?

Four different medicines are currently available to treat influenza. Taking these medications now will not prevent people from getting avian influenza in the future. These medications do not act like a vaccine and will not provide long-term protection. Some strains of avian influenza may be resistant to one of these antiviral medications. However, even if avian influenza causes widespread illness, it is not possible at this time to predict which antiviral medications will be effective against the most common strain. The best thing to do is contact your a health care provider if you are ill to make sure you receive the proper medicine.

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What can I do now to protect myself?

There are many steps you can take to keep yourself and others healthy:

- 1. *Stay home when you are sick***
If possible, stay home from work or school when you are sick. This will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- 2. *Avoid close contact with others who are sick***
- 3. *Avoid unnecessary travel to areas affected by avian influenza***
If you are traveling to another country, the website http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/en/ can provide information if the area you are going to is affected with avian influenza.
- 4. *Get a flu shot***
Although this will not prevent you from getting avian influenza, it will help prevent you from getting the normal flu virus.
- 5. *Cover your mouth and nose***
Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. This may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- 6. *Clean your hands with soap and water***
Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- 7. *Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth***
Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

*For more information, please contact
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